



National Association for College Admission Counseling

Guiding the way to higher education

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Each Spring, much media attention is focused on the college admission process for first-year students, with particular emphasis on acceptance rates and factors that colleges consider when choosing among applicants. However, less attention is focused on the transfer admission process, which affects approximately one-third of students beginning at either a four- or two-year institution during the course of their postsecondary careers.¹ In the Fall of 2006, NACAC included a supplement on its annual Admission Trends survey to learn more about how colleges evaluate candidates in the transfer admission process, as well as acceptance and yield rates for transfer applicants. These survey data, which were collected in partnership with a dissertation project at Michigan State University, provide a baseline snapshot of the transfer admission process. These baseline data will inform NACAC's future research to monitor trends in transfer admission.

NACAC's 2006 Admission Trends Survey

In November 2006, NACAC distributed its annual Admission Trends Survey to all 2,213 four-year, not-for-profit, degree-granting, Title IV-participating institutions of postsecondary education in the United States and outlying areas. NACAC received 386 responses to the survey—a response rate of 17 percent. Of these respondents, 28 percent were public and 72 percent were private, which is nationally representative. Respondents also were largely representative by region, selectivity, and yield; but, public respondents were larger than the national average.

Selectivity and Yield in Transfer Admission

Results of NACAC's survey revealed that the average acceptance rate for transfer applicants was slightly lower than the rate for first-year students (64 percent versus 69 percent). Unlike first-year admission—for which no differences were found between the acceptance rates of public and private colleges—private colleges had somewhat lower acceptance rates for transfer students (62 percent versus 70 percent). As expected, institutions that were more selective (i.e. had lower acceptance rates) for first-year students also had increased selectivity for transfer students². No significant differences in transfer selectivity were found by enrollment size. (See Table 1.)

The average yield rate for transfer admits was much higher than that for first-year students. Institutions enrolled 64 percent of admitted transfer students, while the yield rate for first-year students among the surveyed colleges was 42 percent. Institutions that had high yield rates for first-year students tended to also have high yield rates for transfer admits.³ No differences were found between the transfer yield rates of public and private colleges or by enrollment size. (See Table 1.)

¹Figures refer to students who entered postsecondary education in 1995-96 as of 2001. For those beginning at 2-year institutions, includes only those who aspired to attain a bachelor's degree.

U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2003). College Completion: Additional Efforts Could Help Education with Its Completion Goals (GAO-03-568). Washington, DC.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003). Condition of Education Statistics 2003. Washington, DC.

²Correlation between first-year selectivity and transfer selectivity = .746, $p < .01$

³Correlation between first-year yield and transfer yield = .424, $p < .01$

Factors in Transfer Admission

The postsecondary grade point average is clearly the most important factor for transfer admission, according to results of NACAC's survey. More than 90 percent of survey respondents rated the overall postsecondary GPA as "considerably important," and almost 60 percent gave this rating to grades in transferrable courses.⁴ Another set of factors were rated as moderately or considerably important by a large proportion of colleges: grade point average in high school (56 percent); recommendations and quality of prior postsecondary institution (48 percent each); essay or writing sample (47 percent); and scores on standardized tests (42 percent). Each of the remaining factors that were assessed was rated with low to no importance by nearly two-thirds or more of institutions. (See Table 2.)

As expected, factors related to high school academic performance are less important for transfer students than for first-year students. For first-year admission decisions in the same year, grades in high school college prep courses, strength of high school curriculum, standardized test scores, and overall high school GPA were rated as the top four factors. Although 51 percent of respondents rated high school GPA to be considerably important for first-time students, only 12 percent considered this factor considerably important for transfer admission. The difference for standardized test scores is even more dramatic, with 60 percent rating them as considerably important for first-year admission compared to only 7 percent for transfer admission.

In addition to rating the importance of specific admission factors, NACAC's survey also asked respondents to indicate if another set of transfer applicant characteristics and behaviors were viewed as positive, negative or neutral in selecting candidates for admission. In most cases, the majority of colleges categorized the attributes as neutral, and very few viewed them as negative. About 11 percent of colleges considered it a negative if a student planned to enroll part-time, and 6 percent viewed having 60 or more hours of transferrable credits or having received a GED negatively. Half of the survey respondents considered it a positive if a student had attended a highly competitive four-year institution, and 40 percent viewed the receipt of an Associate's degree favorably. More than one-third of colleges classified the following attributes as positive: student visited the campus, student has a particular academic or professional focus, and student plans to enroll full-time. (See Table 3.)

Factors in Transfer Admission by Institutional Characteristics

The relative importance of various factors in the transfer admission process did not differ drastically among various types of institutions. Postsecondary grades were considered the most important factor by all colleges. However, it is important to note that, to some extent, institutional characteristics determined how each factor in the transfer admission process was considered.

Public and Private Institutions

Private institutions rated almost all of the factors in transfer admission decisions as more important when compared to their public counterparts.

- Private colleges assigned a much higher value than public colleges to the interview, recommendations, essay/writing sample, and quality of prior postsecondary institution.
- Private colleges also ascribed more importance to each of the following factors when compared to their public counterparts: high school GPA, standardized test scores, quality of high school, work/extracurricular activi-

⁴Forty-three percent of colleges reported that they recalculate the transfer applicant's postsecondary GPA, and public colleges were more likely to do so than their private college counterparts (51 percent versus 40 percent). Larger institutions also were more likely to recalculate GPA (correlation = .190, $p < .01$).

ties, ability to pay, race/ethnicity, students' interest in attending, and alumni relations.

- No significant difference was found between public and private institutions in the rating of the most important transfer admission factor—postsecondary GPA. However, private colleges were more likely to consider the second most important factor—postsecondary GPA in transferrable courses—as considerably important, while public colleges rated it as considerable to moderate.⁵ (See Table 4).

Public and private institutions also differed in how they rated the positive, negative, or neutral impact of other transfer applicant attributes.

- Private colleges were more likely to view the following attributes positively: attending a competitive four-year institution, visiting the campus, frequently contacting the admission office, and planning to enroll full-time.
- Public colleges were more likely to view positively having 60 or more hours of transferrable credit, being more than 25 years old, and planning to enroll part-time. (See Table 5.)

Institutional Enrollment

The enrollment size of the institution also affected how the importance of various factors in transfer admission was rated.

- Smaller institutions tended to place more emphasis on many of the transfer admission factors that are direct observations or attributes of the student, including: high school GPA, standardized test scores, essay or writing sample, work/extracurricular activities, recommendations, students' interest in attending, and interview.
- Smaller institutions also attributed greater importance to some of the factors that are largely outside of a student's control, including: quality of the high school and prior postsecondary institution, ability to pay, and alumni relations.
- Smaller institutions also tended to view some of the additional transfer applicant characteristics more positively than their larger counterparts, including: attending a competitive four-year institution, visiting campus, frequently contacting the admission office, and planning to enroll full-time. (See Table 5.)
- Larger institutions tended to rate overall postsecondary GPA, grades in transferrable courses, and state or county of residence more highly.⁶ (See Table 4.)
- Larger institutions also were more likely to view being more than 25 years old as a positive in the transfer admission decision. (See Table 5.)

Transfer Selectivity

Institutions that are more selective for transfer admits (i.e. those that accept fewer applicants) placed greater emphasis on almost all of the factors when compared to less selective institutions.

- More selective institutions assigned a higher value on many of the transfer admission factors that are direct observations or attributes of the student, including: overall postsecondary GPA and grades in transferrable courses,

⁵Correlation between private college status and attribution of importance in transfer admission: high school GPA (.230), standardized tests scores (.227), quality of prior postsecondary institution (.309), quality of high school (.280), essay or writing sample (.344), work/extracurricular activities (.298), recommendations (.465), ability to pay (.247), race/ethnicity (.150), students' interest in attending (.221), alumni relations (.270), interview (.400), $p < .01$

⁶Correlation between enrollment size and attribution of importance in transfer admission: high school GPA (-.152), grades in transferrable courses (.159), standardized test scores (-.175), quality of postsecondary institution (-.174), quality of high school (-.183), essay or writing sample (-.220), recommendations (-.295), ability to pay (-.198), state/county of residence (.190), students' interest in attending (-.261), interview (-.347), $p < .01$; postsecondary GPA (.116), work/extracurricular activities (-.141), alumni relations (-.115), $p < .05$

high school GPA, standardized test scores, essay or writing sample, work/extracurricular activities, and recommendations.

- More selective institutions also indicated greater importance for some of the factors that are largely outside of a student's control, including: quality of the high school and prior postsecondary institution, state or county of residence, race/ethnicity, and alumni relations.⁷ (See Table 4.)
- The most selective institutions also were more likely to view plans to enroll part-time negatively in the admission decision. (See Table 5.)

Merit Scholarships for Transfer Students

More than three-quarters (77 percent) of colleges reported that they provide merit scholarships for transfer students. The smallest institutions (fewer than 3,000 students) were more likely than medium and large institutions (10,000+ students) to offer merit scholarships (81 percent versus 66 percent and 67 percent, respectively). Less selective colleges also were more likely to award merit scholarships to transfer students.⁸

Summary

Many aspects of the admission decision process for transfer students are similar to first-year admission decisions, but some important differences should be noted. In both cases, grades are the most important factor, but for transfer students, grades in the postsecondary institution are far more important than high school grades. Standardized admission test scores also are less important for transfer admission decisions than they are for first-year decisions, presumably because the utility of test scores as predictors of college grades is lessened by knowledge of actual performance in college-level courses. The analysis of transfer admission decision factors also revealed that certain colleges (private, smaller, and more selective) attribute a higher degree of importance to a broader range of factors outside of the top factors, which also is similar to the patterns seen with first-year admission decisions.

⁷Correlation between transfer selectivity and attribution of importance in transfer admission: postsecondary GPA (.151), high school GPA (.213), standardized test scores (.219), quality of postsecondary institution (.175), quality of high school (.198), essay or writing sample (.171), work/extracurricular activities (.249), recommendations (.220), race/ethnicity (.277), alumni relations (.194), $p < .01$; grades in transferrable courses (.136), state/county of residence (.140), $p < .05$

⁸Correlation between transfer selectivity and offering merit scholarships for transfer students = $-.351$, $p < .01$

Table 1. Mean transfer selectivity and yield rates by institutional characteristics: Fall 2006

	Transfer Selectivity	Transfer Yield
Total	64.4%	63.9%
Control		
Public	70.2	65.1
Private	62.4	63.6
Enrollment		
Fewer than 3,000 students	64.4	65.2
3,000 to 9,999	63.3	57.9
10,000 or more	64.9	63.4
First Year Selectivity		
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	39.4	62.2
50 to 70 percent	57.1	64.1
71 to 85 percent	68.7	62.6
More than 85 percent	88.1	68.5
First Year Yield		
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	57.2	54.1
30 to 45 percent	64.0	64.5
46 to 60 percent	69.6	67.7
More than 60 percent	78.1	79.4
Transfer Selectivity		
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	33.6	63.3
50 to 70 percent	61.5	63.3
71 to 85 percent	77.5	62.4
More than 85 percent	94.5	68.3
Transfer Yield		
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	67.0	17.4
30 to 45 percent	57.6	39.3
46 to 60 percent	63.9	53.5
More than 60 percent	64.1	75.7

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2006.

Table 2. Percentage of colleges attributing different levels of importance to factors in the transfer admission decision: Fall 2006

Factor	Considerable importance	Moderate importance	Limited importance	No importance
Grade point average at postsecondary institution	91.9%	5.0%	1.6%	1.6%
Average of grades in transferable courses	58.6	26.1	7.6	7.6
Essay or writing sample	20.5	26.5	21.8	31.2
Recommendations	18.2	29.9	27.0	24.8
Students' interest in attending	12.6	21.1	27.4	38.8
Articulation with prior institution	12.4	22.5	27.6	37.5
Grade point average in high school	11.7	44.0	34.8	9.5
Quality of prior postsecondary institution(s)	11.7	36.1	32.9	19.3
Interview	8.3	20.7	31.2	39.8
Scores on standardized tests (ACT, SAT)	7.3	34.5	38.9	19.3
Work/Extracurricular activities	4.7	26.2	36.3	32.8
Quality of high school	2.8	21.8	41.3	34.1
Ability to Pay	2.5	8.6	11.7	77.1
Alumni Relations	2.5	17.5	33.7	46.3
Race/Ethnicity	2.5	12.7	16.6	68.2
State or county of residence	2.2	6.6	16.5	74.7

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2006.

Table 3. Percentage of colleges rating factors in the transfer admission decision as positive, negative or neutral: Fall 2006

Factor	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Student received a GED prior to postsecondary enrollment	3.4	90.9	5.6
Student received an Associate degree	39.5	60.2	0.3
Student attended a community college	18.0	81.4	0.6
Student attended a highly competitive four-year institution	50.0	49.1	0.9
Student has more than 60 hours of transferable credit	28.4	65.9	5.6
Student visited the campus	38.2	61.1	0.6
Student frequently contacted the admission office	27.7	71.7	0.6
Student is over 25 years old	4.7	93.0	2.2
Student has a particular academic or professional focus	35.8	63.8	0.3
Student plans to enroll full-time	34.4	65.6	0.0
Student plans to enroll part-time	3.2	86.2	10.6

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2006.

Table 4. Percentage of colleges attributing “considerable importance” to factors in the transfer admission decision by institutional characteristics: Fall 2006 (continued)

	Grade point average at postsecondary institution	Grade point average in high school	Average grades in transferable courses	Scores on standardized tests	Quality of prior postsecondary institution(s)	Quality of high school	Articulation with prior institution	Essay or writing sample
Total	91.9%	11.7%	58.6%	7.3%	11.7%	2.8%	12.4%	20.5%
Control								
Public	95.2	3.7	72.5	3.8	7.4	0.0	19.5	6.1
Private	90.8	14.5	53.8	8.5	13.2	3.8	9.9	25.5
Enrollment								
Fewer than 3,000 students	89.4	13.7	50.0	9.8	13.7	3.8	11.3	23.6
3,000 to 9,999	95.8	8.5	71.7	4.3	4.2	2.1	14.9	16.7
10,000 or more	100.0	4.8	85.4	0.0	9.8	0.0	19.5	7.1
Transfer Selectivity								
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	95.3	18.8	71.9	7.8	15.6	4.7	14.3	28.1
50 to 70 percent	94.7	11.5	56.3	8.0	15.3	3.6	12.7	17.0
71 to 85 percent	95.7	4.4	56.1	4.4	5.9	0.0	17.6	16.2
More than 85 percent	80.9	9.1	47.8	8.9	6.5	2.2	8.5	17.4
Transfer Yield								
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	60.0	0.0	40.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	0.0
30 to 45 percent	95.5	19.0	59.1	13.6	14.3	9.5	14.3	42.9
46 to 60 percent	96.9	10.4	62.4	4.2	10.6	1.1	9.7	17.9
More than 60 percent	90.7	10.7	55.4	8.7	13.3	2.7	14.1	20.0

Table 4 continued. Percentage of colleges attributing “considerable importance” to factors in the transfer admission decision by institutional characteristics: Fall 2006

	Work/ Extracurricular activities	Recommendations	Ability to pay	State or county of residence	Race/ Ethnicity	Students' interest in attending	Alumni Relations	Interview
Total	4.7%	18.2%	2.5%	2.2%	2.5%	12.6%	2.5%	8.3%
Control								
Public	1.2	0.0	0.0	6.2	2.4	4.9	1.2	0.0
Private	5.9	24.6	3.4	.9	2.6	15.3	3.0	11.1
Enrollment								
Fewer than 3,000 students	4.7	23.0	3.8	0.9	1.9	17.0	3.3	10.9
3,000 to 9,999	6.3	14.6	0.0	0.0	4.3	2.1	0.0	4.2
10,000 or more	4.9	2.4	0.0	9.8	4.8	0.0	2.4	0
Transfer Selectivity								
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	9.4	26.6	0.0	1.6	4.8	6.3	1.6	9.5
50 to 70 percent	3.6	17.0	2.7	2.7	0.9	11.6	1.8	9.1
71 to 85 percent	2.9	8.7	0.0	0.0	1.5	10.1	1.5	5.9
More than 85 percent	4.3	19.6	6.7	2.2	4.4	19.6	4.3	6.5
Transfer Yield								
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	0.0	0.0	20.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	20.0
30 to 45 percent	13.6	52.4	4.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.5	14.3
46 to 60 percent	3.2	14.7	0.0	1.1	2.2	8.4	0.0	9.5
More than 60 percent	5.4	17.9	3.3	2.0	3.4	18.0	4.0	6.8

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2006.

Table 5. Percentage of respondents who considered the following factors positively in the decision to admit a transfer student by institutional characteristics: Fall 2006 (continued)

	Received GED prior to postsecondary enrollment	Received Associate Degree	Attended community college	Attended competitive four-year institution	More than 60 hours of transferable credit	Visited the campus
Total	3.4%	39.5%	18.0%	50.0%	28.4%	38.2%
Control						
Public	2.5	48.1	25.0	30.0	38.3	12.3
Private	3.8	36.6	15.6	56.7	25.1	47.1
Enrollment						
Fewer than 3,000 students	3.3	40.9	18.8	56.5	28.2	46.3
3,000 to 9,999	2.1	33.3	14.6	52.1	27.1	31.3
10,000 or more	4.9	47.5	20.0	25.0	35.0	4.9
Transfer Selectivity						
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	6.3	32.8	21.9	65.6	21.9	31.3
50 to 70 percent	2.7	41.6	18.8	53.1	34.5	39.8
71 to 85 percent	2.9	48.5	17.6	41.2	30.4	34.8
More than 85 percent	0.0	41.3	8.9	46.7	23.9	46.7
Transfer Yield						
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	0.0	60.0	60.0	60.0	40.0	0.0
30 to 45 percent	0.0	27.3	10.0	63.6	22.7	33.3
46 to 60 percent	2.1	38.9	14.7	52.6	27.1	40.6
More than 60 percent	4.0	44.3	20.0	51.7	30.2	40.0

Table 5 continued. Percentage of respondents who considered the following factors positively in the decision to admit a transfer student by institutional characteristics: Fall 2006

	Frequently contacted the admission office	Over 25 years old	Particular academic or professional focus	Plans to enroll full-time	Plans to enroll part-time
Total	27.7%	4.7%	35.8%	34.4%	3.2%
Control					
Public	8.6	11.3	33.8	21.3	5.1
Private	34.2	2.5	36.6	38.8	2.6
Enrollment					
Fewer than 3,000 students	36.6	2.4	36.9	40.4	3.4
3,000 to 9,999	16.7	8.3	41.7	29.2	2.1
10,000 or more	0.0	15.0	27.5	17.5	2.5
First Year Selectivity					
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	23.9	4.4	34.8	48.9	0.0
50 to 70 percent	26.0	5.3	35.8	29.2	5.3
71 to 85 percent	29.5	5.7	37.7	36.2	2.9
More than 85 percent	32.2	3.4	32.2	30.5	3.4
Transfer Selectivity					
Accept fewer than 50 percent of applicants	25.0	4.7	42.2	48.4	1.7
50 to 70 percent	26.5	4.5	36.3	34.2	2.7
71 to 85 percent	29.4	10.3	33.8	27.9	3.0
More than 85 percent	31.1	0.0	31.1	31.1	4.4
First Year Yield					
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	28.8	1.4	32.9	35.6	0.0
30 to 45 percent	27.2	4.1	32.7	34.0	4.2
46 to 60 percent	27.5	11.8	35.3	28.0	4.2
More than 60 percent	30.3	6.3	51.5	42.4	6.1
Transfer Yield					
Enroll fewer than 30 percent of admitted students	0.0	0.0	20.0	40.0	0.0
30 to 45 percent	33.3	4.8	38.1	57.1	4.5
46 to 60 percent	30.2	3.2	34.4	35.4	1.1
More than 60 percent	28.2	6.7	40.9	35.8	4.1

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2006.